

**Testimony Regarding**

**HB 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023**

**Department of Social Services Budget**

**Appropriations Committee**

**February 23, 2022**

The Youth Network Club, or YNet, is a student youth leadership club focusing on preventing teen dating violence, in partnership between YWCA Greenwich and Greenwich High School. YNet, along with YWCA Greenwich and CCADV, is requesting \$1,440,000 in annual state funding to cover the cost of 18 full-time Child & Family Advocates at each of the state's 18 domestic violence service organizations.

Currently, there is insufficient state funding to support the Child Advocate in working with children who have witnessed domestic violence in their homes, as well as teenagers who have experienced domestic violence themselves.

Youth victims of dating violence are likely to experience adverse outcomes, including depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation. Many teenagers are hesitant to tell family or school personnel about their relationships because they fear consequences for themselves or for their abuser. This dynamic can leave many teens feeling even more isolated.

Earlier this year, YNet held a public awareness event to educate the community about dating violence. After the event, a student disclosed to one of the YNet members that she was experiencing dating violence. The student expressed concerns about disclosing her experience to her parents or a guidance counselor, and wanted to learn about her options before deciding to tell an adult. Because of YNet's close working relationship with the Child Advocate, YNet was able to connect the student to YWCA Greenwich that same day.

The Child Advocate is a confidential resource for teens who may not otherwise feel comfortable confiding in other adults about their experience. The Child Advocate gives teenagers access to free and confidential safety planning and domestic violence crisis counseling, at their own pace. The Child Advocate helps teenagers navigate having conversations with their parents, guidance counselors, and even police about their experience. This safe, free and confidential support promotes safety and resiliency in teenaged survivors and the entire Greenwich community.

YNet does our part to promote healthy relationships at Greenwich High School, and we rely on the Child Advocate to support our fellow students when they experience dating violence. We urge you to invest in this critical service to help us achieve a safe and healthy community.